DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 181 461 CS 205 354

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TITLE How Can We Be Learning English When We're Having So Much Fun?
PUB DATE Nov 79
NOTE 8p.: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English (69th, San Francisco, CA, November 22-24, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Art Activities; *Creative Activities; Creative Art; *Creative Teaching; Creativity; Educational Philosophy; *English Instruction; *Language Arts; Secondary Education; Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

An arts-in-education approach to teaching can be a vital and effective motivating force in a language arts classroom. One teaching strategy based on this approach is to design classroom activities that students can simply enjoy. Several activities that students have found enjoyable include building "happiness machines" based on Ray Bradbury's "Dandelion Wine," developing horror comics from Edgar Allan Poe's stories, and writing book reports in Shakespearian sonnet form. Essentials for using an arts-in-education approach effectively in the language arts classroom are that teachers list for themselves the activity's behavioral goals and objectives, that they review with students the kinds of learning experienced, and that they scatter usage of art strategies in flexible time periods between other kinds of learning activities. (AEA)

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NCTE --San Francisco, 1979

ED181461

HOW CAN WE BE LEARNING ENGLISH WHEN WE'RE HAVING SO MUCH FUN?

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"When are we going to do English?" asks the student with the tight T-shirt.

"What do you mean?" I counter.

"You know, like the other classes," says the blonde in the corner.

"What do you think you've been doing?"

"No...none of this play stuff," says the first student, "I mean like nouns, verbs...stuff like that."

"Oh," I say. "I'll get to it soon."

The class, a basic composition course for high school students, is just finishing an exercise using their own "Roaring Shock" tests as stimuli for creating "cinquain poetry." The technique is simple. At the desk in the front of the room, students, per instruction, squeeze drops of tempera paint onto 9" x 12" manila paper, which they fold, rub, and re-open, revealing instant abstract glories.

Since little paint is used, the drying is rapid. Students take the pictures to their desks and then implement the following instructions.

"Listen carefully. You're going to write information on five lines. First, look at your picture. What does it look like? Find a space on your paper where you have enough room and on the first line, write down the single word your painting most resembles. On the second line, write two

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words that you think best describe the object on the first line. Separate these words with a comma. The third line should be three action words telling what your object does. These words should also be separated by commas, and they may end in "-s," "-ed," or "-ing." Comment about the object in the fourth line. This may be a phrase or a complete sentence. Finally, the last line should be a synonym or a repetition of the word in the first line."

Language teachers have little difficulty in recognizing this practical application of nouns, adjectives, and verbs. We pride ourselves in the knowledge of syntax. Would that our students had the same prideful cognition. Unfortunately, although nouns always seem to be "persons, places or things," the shock of recognition frequently occurs in the classroom when students cannot identify the same nouns as subjects of sentences, and much worse to our point of view, care less. Students express definitions glibly; practical applications of their rote learning is another story.

I suppose among the basic concerns that teachers of language have is a sense of continuity. We are committed to teach the arts of "language-ing"--reading, writing, and speaking--correctly. Let me add, we would like to instill in our students a sense of destiny. Our banner is that of "World Without End"--pride in our past heritage, the vitality of the present, and an obvious hope for the future. And if our students are <u>not</u> cooperating with our particular behavioral goals and objectives, we wail at the walls. Where, oh where, are the students of yesteryear?

Where are the lads and lasses who understood the concept after only three repetitions?

If ours were the only buildings where teachers were having difficulty in motivating students to learn, we might have cause for this inability to fulfill our professional responsibilities. However, the more we read, the more we communicate with other teachers, regardless of their locale, we discover that the problem is nationwide. We squirm with this knowledge. We are hooked on a dilemma that is drowning our conscience. Where can we find salvation?

A desert of ignorance seems to be expanding. The bright ones are gradually disappearing. Listen to your colleagues; read the yearly declining SAT scores. Where does this knowledge leave us as English teachers? Are we to develop mass collective guilt complexes in our struggles to reach today's student? Should we shrug shoulders, go through the daily motions numbly, frustrated, collect our paychecks, and go off into some sunset glorifying a romantic past and bemoaning a sterile future?

First, let us admit that there are no panaceas for successful teaching. What works for teacher "A" can often be a disaster for teacher "B". Many of the techniques with which I have had comparative success are those which I discovered accidentally. Frequently, the strategies exploded as antithetical actions to the students' completion of filling in blank after blank of dry, insistent pages. If I was bored in correcting single word answers, I could imagine the unprintable

(at least in the olden times) student reaction to the exercise.

The relevancy curriculum materials of the late sixties and early seventies are irrelevant for the student who possibly can but currently won't become involved. A reversion to a rote canting of basic syntactical rules is numbing and finally insulting to both teacher and student. Restructuring our approaches offers some avenues for motivation, and perhaps some occasional learning.

The name of the game is "Teaching." The effective teacher attempts many strategies. One goal for alternative teaching strategies is simply to enjoy the activity. Joy in learning does not negate the process of learning. Enjoying the process can be an exciting means toward the achievement of behavioral ends.

Let me state my position clearly. What I have experienced sucessfully with my students are the various facets of an Arts in Education approach to teaching. We no longer have to rationalize this vital and effective philosophy for our classrooms. It the truth were explored, we would discover that language teachers have used art strategies in their teaching for many years. What is new about this usage is the current recognition of the role of arts in the learning process. The May 1979 publication The Arts & Compensatory Education from the Michigan Department of Education, posits the following:

1. The arts can expand and broaden the essential sensory link experiences.
2. The arts require children to practice the same learning operations that are present in other forms of learning.

3. The artistic process is itself a problem solving process.

4. The arts provide new ways of measuring children's capabilities.

5. Engaging children in arts processes helps the child to discover the self and to value that self.

6. Motivation and enjoyment are essential ingredients in the learning environment.

If we are to be concerned with lasting rather than ~~immediate~~ TESTING learning, then our awareness of the above is as important as the subject matter we attempt to impart to our students. I recall the ancient Hebrew teachers, in the times of Hillel, who gave their students a taste of honey when they had learned something so that they would recall that learning was sweet. Joy in learning can be a powerful force.

Once, when I was teaching Ray Bradbury's Dandelion Wine to eighth graders, I was inspired in the middle of a class discussion about the happiness machine to assign students the project of making their own happiness machines. Since I was teaching this novel to three eighth grade classes, over 80 happiness models filled my room from floor to ceiling within the two week period. My favorite was a glass container with the legend, "Pandora's Jar--Do Not Open!" Inside was a sheet of paper on which was written, "War, Pestilence, Famine," in bold red letters. Other projects included a box from which you could crank out play money, a patriotic encounter where an American flag popped up and down when you knew its secret, and even a Playboy multi-media presentation (all of us have a few precocious students.). Some teachers disclaim this kind of activity as "show and tell", but it was fun. Students had a legitimate opportunity to react beyond questions,

answers and essays. From where I sat, there was an additional understanding about student knowledge and values. If one function of reading is self-discovery, in their reactions and creations to what they read, I offered them the pleasureable experience of enjoyment.

The same students developed horror comics from the Poe's stories, and for an ultimate challenge in the omnipresent book report, they related their story plots in Shakespearian sonnet form. ("C'mon, you mean you can't write 140 syllables in a definite rhyme scheme? Anybody can do that!")

Classroom joy can function in all classroom levels, K-12. Here are some basic foundations for using these activities.

1. Use behavioral goals and objectives. Teachers with a strong Puritanical Heritage often have difficulty with classroom fun.
2. Review with students the kinds of learning they have experienced. Generally, I do this immediately following the completed class assignment. As simplistic as it may seem, students need to be told that although they may have enjoyed the activity, learning a particular concept was the function of their work.
3. Arts strategies often involve students in intense motivation. Continued, saturated classroom use may dull jaded student appetites. For most effective results, scatter your usage of strategies with flexible time periods as well as the kinds of activities used.

The activities I have suggested in this paper are only a starting point for teachers seeking alternative solutions to some very real problems. As I stated earlier, these kinds of activities are not the solutions, they are, however, strategies which have been effective in many classrooms. A plethora of material in the commercial market is one indication of how successful the arts strategy approach can be. Teacher usage creates a demand. It is a pragmatic demand evolving from a strongly felt need.

Joy and learning need not be strange bedfellows. They can live happily ever after. The song once said, "Let yourself go!" Try combining these elements. You might be amazed at the results.